

**STATEMENT OF ROBERT KOHN, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER OF COLT GATEWAY LLC BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON NATIONAL PARKS, RECREATION, AND PUBLIC LANDS OF THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES**

**April 8, 2003**

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before your committee to present the views of Colt Gateway LLC and Homes For America Holdings, Inc. on H.R. 437. This bill would direct the Secretary of the Interior to conduct a study of the site commonly known as "Coltsville" in the State of Connecticut for potential inclusion in the National Park System.

**An Introduction**

As the Chief Operating Officer of Colt Gateway LLC, a subsidiary of Homes For America Holdings, Inc., I strongly support a study to include Coltsville in the National Park System. Coltsville's national significance, suitability and feasibility for designation as well as the importance of the site to the historic preservation of an American legacy make this site an ideal candidate for inclusion in the National Park System. In my opinion, there are few more deserving locations for the National Park designation than Coltsville. Coltsville's fascinating history, its impact on innovation and American history, its positioning as the home of Elizabeth Colt as one of the first female industrialists, the site's compatibility with other nearby National Parks and the momentum, planning and financing currently in place to make this Park a reality... all are persuasive grounds for supporting this study.

**The Coltsville Study Area**

Coltsville is a 17-acre community in Hartford, Connecticut built around Samuel and Elizabeth Colt's firearms factory during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century. Currently owned and operated by Colt Gateway LLC, the site itself contains ten historic buildings, portions of which are occupied by both commercial and residential tenants, including a large number of artists who live and work in the complex. Colt Gateway LLC is currently conducting a substantial \$102 million historic rehabilitation and preservation of the site, in full accordance with national historic standards. The East Armory building within the site, with its landmark red brick building and distinctive blue onion dome, would serve as the ideal center for the Park

Easily accessible from Interstates 91 and 84, Coltsville runs parallel to the nearby Connecticut River and is within walking distance of the Hartford central business district. Within the immediate area are former buildings that housed Colt workers as well as splendid Victorian homes such as Armsmear, which served as the home of Samuel and Elizabeth Colt and is now

a National Historic Landmark. Other attractions in the immediate area help to make Coltsville even more of a destination, including the houses of Mark Twain and Harriet Beecher Stowe, the Museum of American Political Life, the Colt Memorial and of course the riverfront. Other significant nearby attractions include the State Capitol, the Museum of Connecticut State History and the Wadsworth Atheneum museum, which stores vast collections of Colt-related artifacts and archives.

### A Brief History of Coltsville

Samuel Colt, born in Hartford in 1814, lived the life of a legend. With his first patent in 1836, he founded a company that played a leading role in the Industrial Revolution. Construction of the Coltsville factory began in 1847 and expanded throughout the mid-19th century, including the construction in 1855 of the armory's distinctive blue onion dome, a Hartford landmark visible from I-91. In order to attract laborers, Colt built a self-contained community surrounding the factory that included housing, gardens, and entertainment halls as well as a library, school, church and social hall. Many of the structures still exist today and are part of the Colt Industrial National Register District that was listed in 1976.

Samuel Colt died in 1862, and two years later the factory burned to the ground. In a fascinating example of one of this country's first female industrialists, Elizabeth Colt took over the factory and ran it successfully for another 40 years. In fact, Samuel Colt's most recognized accomplishment, the Colt 45 Peacemaker, was not actually developed or manufactured until ten years after his death. Elizabeth presided over the company during its most prosperous years, in a period when men dominated the industrial world. Her significant contributions to American industrialism make Coltsville distinct from other historical sites and establish a broader base than the history of munitions manufacture. This is a place where a dynamic woman seized the helm of her husband's company, steering it to ongoing success through the manufacture of innovations that changed the face of American history. Elizabeth Colt gives the site a central story, broad utility, a greater audience and a compelling reason to visit.

### Coltsville Innovation & Impact on American History

Coltsville is most known as the birthplace of a concept that transformed the firearm from a single shot device into a multiple shot device and changed the course of American economic and military history. The Colt revolver was a revolutionary weapon that changed military tactics and eventually made all weapons that came before it obsolete in combat.

Coltsville's unique and considerable impact on Connecticut and New England is clear. The skills developed in firearms manufacture were given broader application here. Developments in arms-making influenced other metalworking industries, such as sewing machines, typewriters, bicycles, automobiles, railway equipment, jet engines and clocks. Early industrial leaders like Henry Ford came to Coltsville to learn the innovative manufacturing techniques and equipment being developed in the area. The corridor between New Haven, Connecticut and Windsor, Vermont became known as "Precision Valley";

In addition to the impact on Connecticut and New England, Coltsville's impact in America and

abroad cannot be understated. As the first American to set up a foreign manufacturing plant, Samuel Colt's influence was extended overseas. Ambitious entrepreneurs with big ideas, Elizabeth and Samuel were willing to take risks and work hard to shape the future and to reap the rewards. In doing so they have powered American capitalism. The Colt legacy is not just about firearms, but also about industrial innovation and the development of technology and a system of manufacturing that would change the way of life in the United States. That same spirit of innovation today powers all of American industry and can be seen in such sectors as information technology, medical research, biotechnology, defense technology, public relations and many others.

Today, the Colt name is known throughout the world. Colt firearms and other products have been used in every major conflict - from the U.S.-Mexican War to the present. As such they have been an integral factor in the security, confidence and self-reliance of this country. The impact on Coltsville in this arena confirms our conviction that Coltsville should be designated a National Park.

#### The National Park: A Preliminary Plan

A national park at Coltsville would ideally encompass all seventeen acres of the Coltsville site and would include both public and private space. The centerpiece would be a visitor center within the armory, including original steam-driven pistons and the accessible blue onion dome that provides 360° views of Hartford, the Connecticut River and surrounding areas. Coincidentally, this armory already houses a business that manufactures replica Colt firearms, which would only enhance the proposed museum. The interactive museum could be housed in Building 8 and/or 10, which are two of the oldest buildings on the site and originally served as the factory's foundry and polishing rooms. The museum and visitors' center would be dedicated as public space for the Park. The remaining commercial and residential space would be left private.

It is important to note that because Colt Gateway LLC is already in the process of privately restoring this national treasure, the cost of designating Coltsville would be minimal. A comprehensive \$102 million historic preservation in accordance national historic standards is currently underway. As the developer, Colt Gateway LLC would prepare virtually all the space required, giving the National Park Service the rare opportunity to add a spectacular park to the system with an investment and operating costs at a fraction (less than 10%) of the value of the site. It is our opinion that, please forgive the pun, Coltsville gives the National Parks System a real bang for the buck.

The tourist interest sparked by the Coltsville Park would work in tandem with other endeavors stimulating business growth, such as the adjacent Adriaen's Landing project, to contribute to the continuing economic revival of Connecticut's capital city. Lowell, Massachusetts is a good example of what a national park can do for a city. The textile mills and canals at Lowell have been described as must-see attractions in tourist guidebooks. I believe that if Coltsville is designated a national park, the same will be said about the Colt armory and its surroundings. Moreover, the history of Colt complements that of the Springfield Armory National Historic Site just 25 miles north in Massachusetts.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, it is my opinion that it is not only feasible and suitable to include Coltsville in the National Park System, but that Coltsville is the ideal candidate for that inclusion. We are committed to preserving Coltsville's immeasurable historical value, and we certainly appreciate the Committee's consideration of this proposal. We are eager to work with the National Park Service in any way we can to continue this process.

While we acknowledge the budgetary and scheduling obstacles of our request, we believe that the overwhelming bipartisan support for designation is a sign that we are well on our way to preserving Coltsville's legacy. Support from public officials such as Connecticut Governor John Rowland and Mayor of Hartford Eddie Perez as well as from important civic groups in Connecticut and elsewhere has been considerable. I would also like to commend Representatives Larson, DeLauro, Shays and Simmons as well as Senators Dodd and Lieberman for their leadership and integral role in supporting Coltsville.

Again, thank you for the opportunity to comment. We will do all we can to assist you, Mr. Chairman, and all the members of the Committee, to make this a reality. This concludes my prepared remarks. I would be glad to answer any questions that you or the members of the committee may have.